



INSTITUTE of  
MUSEUM  
and LIBRARY  
SERVICES

# Field Reviewer National Handbook Leadership Grants

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# THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS REVIEW PROCESS

Thank you for offering to serve as a National Leadership Grant field reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your expertise in one of the competitive categories of funding for libraries and/or museums.

The staff at IMLS has prepared this handbook specifically for field reviewers to ensure fair and candid review of all eligible applications. It will provide you with the procedural information you need. Please use it in conjunction with this year's *National Leadership Grant Application and Guidelines*. Even if you are an experienced reviewer, you'll need to refresh your memory and note any changes.

## Before reading the handbook, please do the following:

- Review the Reviewer Checklist included in your review package.
- Mail the card to IMLS (attached to the checklist) verifying that you have received all of the materials.

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## THE NLG PROGRAM

The National Leadership Grant (NLG) program provides Federal grants through an annual, competitive process. In the NLG program:

- Applications are evaluated by peers;
- Evaluations are based on the application's strength in proving that the applicant:
  - Meets applicable evaluation criteria as outlined in the *NLG Guidelines*; and
  - Addresses the priorities for this funding cycle as explained in the *Guidelines*

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## THE NLG PROCESS

1. Applicants receive the *National Leadership Grant Application and Guidelines* and submit proposals to IMLS.
2. IMLS identifies a pool of qualified reviewers and sends out reviewer application forms.
3. IMLS receives the grant applications, checks them for eligibility and completeness.
4. IMLS matches grant applications to field reviewers with appropriate expertise.
5. Reviewers review the applications and send their Comment and Scoring sheets to IMLS.
6. IMLS ranks proposals based on field review scores and determines which proposals will go forward for panel review.
7. Panels make funding recommendations.
8. IMLS Director makes final funding decisions.
9. IMLS staff notifies successful applicants and provides feedback to all applicants.
10. IMLS provides feedback to proposal reviewers.

# APPLICATION REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS

## I. First Steps

This section of the handbook contains detailed information on how to review an NLG application. If you think that you may not be able to review every proposal you have received, do not begin the review process. Instead contact IMLS at once and notify the appropriate staff contact.

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### QUALITIES OF A GOOD PROPOSAL

A good NLG proposal should:

- Demonstrate National Impact as defined in the *Guidelines*
- Successfully address each criterion
- Address priorities for the funding cycle (Refer to the section on priorities in the *Guidelines*.)

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### TIME REQUIRED

Experienced reviewers estimate that it takes two to three hours to evaluate one application. If you are a first time NLG reviewer, you may need more time. We recommend the reviewing process outlined on the following pages.

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### CHECK SHIPPING BOX

If you haven't already done so, refer to the contents listed on the Reviewer Checklist. Contact IMLS immediately if any of the items listed are missing.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Read the "Conflict of Interest Statement" carefully. Then read through your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. If there are not, read and sign the Conflict of Interest Statement. You will send this form to IMLS with your completed review forms. If there is a potential conflict, contact IMLS immediately. Once you have reviewed an application, you should *never* represent the applicant in dealings with the IMLS or other Federal agencies in regard to this grant application or award.

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### CONFIDENTIALITY

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions, project activities or any other information contained in the applications. Contact IMLS if you have any questions concerning an application—do not contact an applicant directly.

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### APPLICATION COMPLETENESS

Check your applications to make sure that all required information is included. We only check the original application. We do not check every page of each reviewer copy for completeness. ***If any application appears to be incomplete, contact IMLS immediately.***

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### SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION

The chart on the following page presents a week-by-week guide to completing the review process. You may want to use this chart as a model for your own schedule.

## FOUR-WEEK SCHEDULE OF COMPLETION

	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4
ACTIVITY 1	1) Using the NLG Reviewer Checklist, <b>check</b> box for all materials.			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check each application for completeness</li> <li>• Contact IMLS with any problems</li> <li>• Read and sign the Conflict of Interest Statement</li> </ul>			
ACTIVITY 2	2) <b>Read</b> the <i>NLG Reviewer Handbook</i> and the <i>NLG Application and Guidelines</i> .			
ACTIVITY 3	3) <b>Evaluate</b> applications: 1 <sup>st</sup> read to understand range of responses.			
ACTIVITY 4	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>←</span> <span>4) 2<sup>nd</sup> read-through: write comments and assign scores</span> <span>→</span> </div>			
ACTIVITY 5	5) Review comments and scores; adjust as necessary			
ACTIVITY 6	6) Return Comment and Scoring sheets			
ACTIVITY 7	7) Return signed Conflict of Interest statement			
ACTIVITY 8	8) Complete and return Reviewer Questionnaire			
ACTIVITY 9	9) Keep application and review sheets until October 1 and then destroy			

## **II. Evaluating Applications**

IMLS asks you to express your professional judgment of each proposal in the following three ways: (1) Assess if the proposal addresses priorities; (2) Write comments for each criterion; and (3) Assign a numerical score to each criterion. Note that comments that support your scores are required.

Your judgment should reflect how well you think the information provided in each proposal addresses the goals and stated criteria of NLG.

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### **READ AND POST EVALUATION CRITERIA**

Read the NLG Evaluation Criteria poster, which lists the criteria that NLG proposals are expected to address. Place this poster in your workplace where you can easily refer to it throughout the review process. Read the *National Leadership Grant Application and Guidelines*, which provides more information about the evaluation criteria and describes the guidelines of the NLG program. Your understanding of these criteria is an essential factor in a successful review.

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### **READ APPLICATIONS**

Read your applications to develop a feel for the range of responses. Take notes as you read. Read each application again.

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### **ADDRESS FUNDING PRIORITIES**

Each year funding priorities are identified in the *Guidelines*. In the section on Funding Priorities on the Comment and Scoring sheet, please indicate whether the project addresses one or more of the priorities listed in the *Guidelines* for its category by circling “yes” or “no”.

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### **WRITE COMMENTS**

Insert the diskette into your computer and access the Comment and Scoring sheet or duplicate paper copies as needed. If possible, type comments on a computer. If you don’t have computer access, type or use a black ink pen. DO NOT use pencil or blue ink.

Reread the evaluation criteria on the poster. Draft a comment that reflects your judgment for each of the evaluation criteria.

Write your comments in the space after “Comments” on the score line for each criterion. Use your professional knowledge and experience to make objective assessments. Include page citations from the proposal to justify your comments. Note that comments that support your scores are required. In order to be effective, comments must reflect the assigned scores.

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**SAMPLE  
COMMENTS**

The next few pages contain comments from field reviewers. Those comments labeled as “good” comments, based on evidence provided in the application, are substantive, tactful, and helpful to the evaluation. Remember that these are samples only. Feel free to use the good ones as models when preparing your own but DO NOT copy or paraphrase our samples. Each application is unique and deserves its own unique comments.

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**GOOD  
COMMENTS**

Some of the characteristics of good comments are:

- Presented in a constructive manner
- Concise, specific, easy to read and understand
- Specific to the individual applicant
- Reflect the professionalism of the reviewer
- Correlate with the score that is given
- Acknowledge the resources of the institution
- Reflect the application’s strengths and identifies areas for improvement
- Directed to applicants for their use

*Remember:* Successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their awards or future applications!

Each of the sample comments listed below is followed by an explanation of its good characteristics.

**National Impact:** *“This project provides a means by which libraries can move beyond only providing access to digitized collections. This project can provide a model that supports the incorporation of artifacts and library information sources utilizing multi-media for undergraduate courses. The Web site, with the images, library resources, and additional pieces to be added by students enrolled in the credit courses, should serve as a model for demonstrating how classes can be improved and collections enriched via application of the Internet.”* (Provides a good explanation of how this project serves as a model)

**Budget/Contributions:** *“The budget is realistic for the number of trainers and trainees. Compensation of consultants and the number of hours for their assistance are reasonable for this project.”* (Provides specific information)

**General Comments:** *“Addresses an area of critical concern for museums, but two major barriers exist: Not enough planning is in evidence in the evaluation and dissemination steps, and more evidence of institution support is required—their commitment is not clear in this application.”* (Identifies strengths and areas for improvement)

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## POOR COMMENTS

Listed below are “poor” comments from past reviews. Comments that are considered poor are vague, irrelevant, insensitive, or unclear. These comments actually hinder the evaluation process rather than help it.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution doesn’t need the money—remember, any eligible institution may apply for and receive NLG funds, regardless of need.
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials, unless you have determined that the materials are missing from the original application. If you are missing *required* materials, contact IMLS immediately.
- Make derogatory remarks—offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.
- Question an applicant’s honesty or integrity. You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to raise your question, contact IMLS.
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information—your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.

Each of the sample poor comments listed below is followed by an explanation of why it is a poor comment.

**Adaptability:** *“The project is obviously attempting to make the work adaptable—good work.”* (Vague)

**Evaluation:** *“Weakest part of the proposal. Could be strengthened.”* (Vague)

**Personnel:** *“The project personnel seem to be well qualified, but this institution does not have a national reputation.”* (Insensitive and irrelevant)

**Budget:** *“I might question some parts of the budget, but they probably know what they’re doing.”* (Not evaluative; vague, and irrelevant)

**National Impact:** *“Addresses issues of digitization crucial to most cultural institutions.”* (Does not address how those issues are presented or what their impact is on the proposals—vague)

### III. Assigning Scores

After you have written comments for each applicable criterion, you will assign a score. To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments. If you have questions, contact IMLS.

- Read the NLG Scoring Definitions below for a description for each of the five scores.
- Assign a score from 1 to 5 to each of the ten project criteria.
- Assign a score that correlates with your comment and is, in your judgment, appropriate.

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#### SCORING DEFINITIONS

<u>Score</u>	<u>Definition</u>
1	Does not meet this criterion
2	Partially meets this criterion
3	Meets this criterion
4	Exceeds this criterion
5	Exceeds this criterion and is a leadership model

#### Important

- Assign *whole numbers* only.
- *Do not* use fractions, decimals, zeros or more than one number in scoring individual criteria.

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#### SAMPLE SCORING

Both the written comments and the scores assigned to criteria provide important information to applicants. The score assigned to a criterion must correlate with the written comments for that criterion. The next few pages contain examples of scoring from field reviewers.

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#### GOOD SCORING

Good scoring accurately reflects the reviewer's written comments. If a comment describes mostly strengths for a given criterion, the assigned score should be high. If a comment describes mostly weaknesses for a given criterion, the assigned score should be low.

*Remember:* A score assigned to a given criterion should accurately reflect the written comments for that criterion.

Each of the sample scoring examples listed below is followed by an explanation why it is an example of good scoring.

**Evaluation:** *“Project addresses assessment of how students are directly affected by proposal; however, consideration is not given for evaluation of other participating agencies.”* Score: 2 (The 2 rating indicating “partially meets this criterion” is justified by the reviewer's comments)

**National Impact:** *“This project provides a means by which libraries can move beyond only providing access to digitized collections. This project can provide a model that supports the incorporation of artifacts and library information sources utilizing multi-media for*



*undergraduate courses. The Web site, with the images, library resources, and additional pieces to be added by students enrolled in the credit courses, should serve as a model for demonstrating how classes can be improved and collections enriched via application of the Internet.” Score: 5 (The high rating is justified because the comments provide many examples of the strengths of this project)*

**General Comments:** *“Addresses an area of critical concern for museums, but two major barriers exist: Not enough planning is in evidence in the evaluation and dissemination steps, and more evidence of institution support is required—their commitment is not clear in this application.” Score: 3 (The comment identifies strengths and areas for improvement, justifying a score of 3)*

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## POOR SCORING

Poor scoring does not correlate with the reviewer’s written comments. If a comment describes mostly strengths for a given criterion, and the assigned score is low, there is a mismatch between comment and score.

*Remember:* A score assigned to a given criterion should accurately reflect the written comments for that criterion.

Each of the sample scoring examples listed below is followed by an explanation why it is an example of poor scoring.

**Budget/Contributions:** *“The budget is realistic for the number of trainers and trainees. Compensation of consultants and the number of hours for their assistance are reasonable for this project.” Score: 2 (The assigned rating of 2 indicates that the application partially meets this criterion. However, the comment indicates only strengths)*

**Adaptability:** *“The operation of the partnership seems to work here, but might not be applicable to similar groups.” Score: 4 (In order to merit a rating of 4, the comment should reflect stronger evidence of adaptability throughout the project)*

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## COMPUTE FINAL SCORES

Follow the directions on the Comment and Scoring sheet to compute the final score. Recheck your figures carefully. *A Comment and Scoring sheet with missing comments and scores cannot be accepted.*

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## PROJECTS INVOLVING DIGITIZATION

**For projects involving digitization,** be sure that the applicant has addressed in the proposal the Guidance for Digitization Projects (page 1.11 of the *Guidelines*), and has completed the form on page 3.12 “Specifications for Projects Involving Digitization.”

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## PROVIDE ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Space is provided at the end of the Comment and Scoring sheet for any additional comments that might help the applicant to improve the proposal for future submission or might help the applicant to carry out project goals in other ways.

## **IV. Mailing Review Sheets**

IMLS will need one signed copy and one unsigned copy of each of the applications you have reviewed. You will also need one copy (signed or unsigned) of each of the applications for your records.

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### **MAILING CHECKLIST**

1. Complete the Comment and Scoring sheet.
2. Before signing on the last page and attaching your reviewer label, make two copies.
3. Sign one copy and place the reviewer label at the bottom of the last page of the signed Comment and Scoring sheet.
4. Do not sign the other copy.
5. Keep the original Comment and Scoring sheet for each application for your records. These may be signed or unsigned.
6. Staple the pages of each copy together.
7. Group all of the signed copies in one stack in log number order. These will be used by IMLS.
8. Group all of the unsigned copies in another stack in log number order. These will be provided to applicants.
9. Complete the Reviewer Questionnaire with your comments about the review process.
10. If you have not previously done so, sign the Conflict of Interest Statement.
11. Mail the following to IMLS in the enclosed return envelope by the date indicated in the IMLS Letter:
  - The signed copies of the Comment and Scoring Sheet
  - The unsigned copies of the Comment and Scoring Sheet
  - The word processing diskette containing the Comment and Scoring Sheet
  - The signed Conflict of Interest Statement
  - The completed Reviewer Questionnaire

## **V. Final Step**

Keep your copies of the applications and your copies of the Comment and Scoring sheets you have reviewed on file until October 1 and then destroy them.

**THANK YOU FOR SERVING AS AN NLG FIELD REVIEWER!**

## NLG APPLICATION COMMENT AND SCORING SHEET

**Applicant:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Log Number:**\_\_\_\_\_

### EVALUATION CHECKLIST

- For the description of each of the criteria, see the Evaluation Criteria poster
- In the space after “Comments” under the score line for each criterion write a comment to express your professional judgment. Include page citations from the proposal to justify your comments where appropriate.
- Assign a score to each criterion using the rating guide below. Use only whole numbers. Do not use zeros, fractions or decimals, or more than one number.
- Compute the total of the scores for all criteria and enter in the space provided.

### FUNDING PRIORITIES

Did the project address one or more of the priorities listed for its category? Circle the appropriate response:

Yes   No

### RATING GUIDE

Use the Rating Guide below in scoring each of the evaluation criteria.

1	2	3	4	5
Does not meet this criterion	Partially meets this criterion	Meets this criterion	Exceeds this criterion	Exceeds this criterion and is a leadership model

## EVALUATION CRITERIA

Criterion 1. National Impact  
Comments:

Score:\_\_\_\_

Criterion 2. Adaptability  
Comments:

Score:\_\_\_\_

Criterion 3. Design  
Comments:

Score:\_\_\_\_

Criterion 4. Management Plan  
Comments:

Score:\_\_\_\_

Criterion 5. Budget  
Comments:

Score:\_\_\_\_

## RATING GUIDE

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Does not meet this criterion	Partially meets this criterion	Meets this criterion	Exceeds this criterion	Exceeds this criterion and is a leadership model

Criterion 6. Contributions

Score:\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Criterion 7. Personnel

Score:\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Criterion 8. Project Evaluation

Score:\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Criterion 9. Dissemination

Score:\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Criterion 10. Sustainability

Score:\_\_\_\_

Comments:

**TOTAL SCORE:\_\_\_\_**

### **RATING GUIDE**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Does not meet this criterion	Partially meets this criterion	Meets this criterion	Exceeds this criterion	Exceeds this criterion and is a leadership model

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

Use this space to write additional comments or suggestions for the applicant that can help to improve the proposal for future submission or to carry out project goals in other ways.

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**BEFORE SIGNING AND PLACING REVIEWER LABEL, MAKE 2 COPIES!**

I have reviewed the application cited above in compliance with the application review procedures.  
I have provided scores and comments for all applicable criteria.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

**Place Reviewer Label Here**